

report by the Institute of Medicine on medication errors found that safe staffing and limits on mandatory overtime are essential components to preventing medication errors. An investigative report by the Chicago Tribune also found that patient safety was sacrificed when reductions in hospital staff resulted in registered nurses working long overtime hours and being more likely to make serious medical errors.

Mr. Speaker, these studies confirm the grim stories I hear from my constituents on a regular basis. In fact, last October 1,900 people participated in a 1-day strike at Rhode Island Hospital which illustrated the magnitude of this problem facing Rhode Island nurses, hospitals and patients.

I understand that hospitals need an ample supply of nurses to safely administer patient needs, and they are not to blame for our Nation's nursing shortages. But with nurses within the Lifespan Hospital network in my State working 180,000 hours of overtime, the equivalent of 22,500 extra 8-hour shifts last year, I cannot understand why Congress does not act now to stop this injustice which risks the lives of thousands of Americans each and every day.

Mr. Speaker, what happened in Rhode Island is happening across America. That is why I urge my colleagues to join the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. CAPPS), the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS), and me in ensuring expedient passage of both of these bills to help our hard-working nurses and to improve the kind of quality of health care that Americans expect and deserve.

ESTATE TAX RELIEF

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. BAIRD) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BAIRD. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor today as a strong supporter of reforming estate tax. In the past 2½ years, I have voted for estate tax reform almost every time it was offered on this floor. I even voted to override President Clinton's veto of the bill.

But since then there have been significant changes in our economy and in the tax proposals before this body. This administration, the Bush administration, has put all of its political muscle behind a \$1.6 trillion tax cut. The House has already used \$958 billion of this amount by approving income tax rate cuts, and we have used an additional \$399 billion to fix the marriage penalty and phase in an increase in the child tax credit. Together, these bills have chewed up more than \$1.36 trillion, 84 percent of the total tax cut proposed by the President.

Mr. Speaker, I will say right now that I think the administration's overall proposal is too large. It is too large because we do not know whether to-

day's surpluses will be there tomorrow, and there are other tax changes which are sure to come before this body which will cost billions more.

What are we going to do to correct the problems associated with the alternative minimum tax? What are we going to do about making permanent the R&D tax credit? What do we do about fixing other unfair aspects of the Tax Code, like reinstating the sales tax deduction?

If we want to talk about real unfairness, let us reinstate sales tax deductibility to establish fairness for Washington State residents and the residents of six other States who have no income tax but pay sales taxes and cannot deduct them from their Federal return.

Today's bill should also be about fairness. The estate tax should not burden small business, small farms and individuals who have accumulated sizable assets through years of hard work. I am frustrated that some in Congress are playing numbers games because this bill that we passed today does not solve the problem quickly enough for many folks in my district. The bulk of the estate tax bill that we passed today will not be felt for 10 years. Then what happens in 10 years? The baby boom generation retires, and we have increases in our needs for Social Security and Medicare.

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It is unclear to me why the majority has not and will not look at other legislative proposals to solve the estate tax problems. I am frustrated with the "my way or the highway" approach that they have taken. That is why earlier today I voted against the rule on this bill. We should have had more and better options to choose from. It should not just be a coin toss.

The Democrats put forward a bill that would take care of the estate problem today for more than 99 percent of all Americans. I do not think that bill was perfect, but I think it contained some good ideas. And I do think if we took the best parts of the Republican bill, the best parts of the Democratic bill, cleaned up some problems, we could have had something we all supported. But that does not seem to be the way we do business around here these days.

When I came to this body, we elected a Speaker who pledged bipartisan; we elected a President recently who pledged bipartisanship, but we are not seeing it. Here was an opportunity for true bipartisanship, to get together, draw the best of both bills from both parties and come up with a real solution.

Mr. Speaker, this takes a personal note for me. A month and a half ago my father passed away. One of the last things he said to me, quite literally one of the last things, was, "Son, I'm

concerned about repealing the estate tax. I worry that we risk concentrating wealth too heavily in this country."

Two days ago I met with the owners of a Toyota dealership who told me, "Congressman, we are concerned that if we have too exorbitant an estate tax, we won't be able to pass our dealership on to our kids and their families." I met with George and Peggy Thoeni, family farmers in my district, who have worked their whole life to build a family farm, and they want to pass that on to their children.

Mr. Speaker, my father was right. So are George and Peggy Thoeni, and so are Marvin and Shirley McChord. We desperately need to reform the estate tax, but we must not do so in a way that concentrates wealth inordinately in our country and jeopardizes our financial future.

Today, I voted for both the Democratic alternative and for final passage on the final bill, but we could have done better, Mr. Speaker. In true bipartisanship we could have come together, before the bills came here, and we could have crafted something that protects family businesses and small farms today, not 10 years down the road; that does not add new burdensome regulatory complications to the Tax Code; that does not allow the very, very wealthiest people in this country to pass their estates on with no tax burden whatsoever. We could have done that, but we did not.

I would hope that before this bill finally becomes law, we do come together in genuine bipartisanship. In so doing we would honor the wishes of both my father, of George and Peggy Thoeni and the McChords. Let us do this together, and let us do it right. The people deserve our doing so.

SPY PLANE STANDOFF

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. SHIMKUS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, the South China Sea has always been an area of constant stress for our men and women in military uniforms, especially the cat-and-dog fights that have gone on, really for many of the past years. That is why an accident was bound to happen.

China believes the U.S. plane caused the collision by making an abrupt turn while two Chinese fighter pilots shadowed it. Give me a break. The EP-3 is a lumbering turtle, while the Chinese J8s respond like nimble jackrabbits. Colin Powell has stated, "A tragic accident took place. We regret that the Chinese plane did not get down safely. We regret the loss of life of the Chinese pilot, but now we need to move on. We need to bring this to a resolution."

Make no mistake, the planes were operating in international airspace. By